

**A Biodiversity Strategy for Lake Ontario**  
EPA Region 5 - Chicago - Great Lakes National Program Office

**Geographic location or area of activity:** Lake Ontario basin covering the United States and Canada

**Description of activity:** The recently-completed Great Lakes Conservation Blueprint has established a common foundation for a Lake Ontario biodiversity strategy by identifying high-priority areas to conserve.

While conservation blueprints and lists of habitat priorities provide important information about where to work, they are not intended to clarify how to protect and manage ecological systems, natural communities, or species. This project used these blueprints of priority sites as the starting point to develop multi-site, ecosystem-based strategies to improve the ecological health of Lake Ontario.

Using a process known as Conservation Action Planning (CAP), an array of partners in the U.S. and Canada developed a shared protocol to protect and restore Lake Ontario's biodiversity. The CAP process clarified linkages between specific conservation actions and ecosystem health, and it creates mechanisms to track and measure progress.

This collaborative process:

- identified the species, natural communities, ecological systems or key abiotic processes which will serve as focal targets for planning and conservation action
- assessed the current status and viability of these targets
- identified the threats that endanger the health of these targets
- identified the sources of these threats (e.g., several factors may contribute to cattail dominance in coastal wetlands – lake level regulation, excessive nutrients, or invasive cattail varieties)
- designed multi-site conservation strategies to reduce these stresses and enhance the health of focal targets
- developed measures of success (indicators) to evaluate the effectiveness of conservation strategies

The fourth and final Lakewide Management Plan (LaMP)-based Biodiversity Conservation Strategy workshop for Lake Ontario was held December 5th and 6th, 2007, in Niagara on the Lake, Ontario. The purpose was to review the final draft and identify implementation actions for areas within the watershed needing protection or restoration. Coastal reaches where place-based strategies are needed were identified by conservation targets (nearshore waters, coastal shore and wetlands, migratory fish and tributaries.) Maps displaying the condition of watersheds and coastal reaches were reviewed.

A final strategy and grant report for this project (funded by GLNPO through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation) will be available in spring 2008. At that time, the strategy will be handed over to the four parties involved in the Lakewide Management Plan for implementation: US EPA, New York Department of Environmental Conservation, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Canada.

**Interagency partners:** Participants included over 50 people from Environment Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, numerous Conservation Authorities, New York Department of Environmental Conservation and three U.S. federal agencies: EPA, and from Department of Interior - Fish and Wildlife Service and Geological Survey

**Local partners:** Oswego and Monroe Counties in New York, Cornell and SUNY Brockport Universities, the Tug Hill Commission, Natural Heritage Institute, Great Lakes Protection Fund, Genesee-Finger Lakes Regional Planning, The Nature Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy of Canada

**Activity URL:** <http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/lakeontario.conservation>